

**CULTURAL
FEATURES OF CITIES
COMMUNICATION
ALONG THE GREAT
SILK ROAD IN THE
TERRITORY OF
KAZAKHSTAN****The Great Silk Road in Kazakhstan**

The Great Silk Road served as a single transcontinental bridge between Europe and Asia for many centuries. It connected peoples, communities and cultures from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, linking territories as well as artistic and spiritual cultures for the first time in the mankind history. The Great Silk Road facilitated the exchange of material assets and trade, as well as the development of crafts, the establishment of new settlements, and the interaction of entire cultural systems. Today, the area continues to play an important role in various industries and communication.

The Great Silk Road contributed to give identity to many of the territories through which it passed. In the case of this paper, the development of the Republic of Kazakhstan retains particular features that can be traced back to those ancient commercial routes and ways of life. The cities along the route retain their status as monuments of ancient civilizations, bearing an important historical and cultural weight, significant for the genetic memory of the Kazakh people. The area that today occupies the Republic of Kazakhstan was both the scene of constant struggles for the possession of territories, and a point of contact between very diverse communities.

It would be unfair to reduce the importance of the Great Silk Road in the history of world civilization solely to the silk trade, when its impact was much wider and varied. Trade caravans and diplomatic embassies travelled along the Road, carrying not just Eastern and Western goods, but also cultural and spiritual values. Temples and houses of worship are among the first monuments that contemporary travellers can still find in sites such as Kashgar, Taraz, or Samarkand when they visit today [1: 55].

The Silk Road not only makes available a variety of ancient sites and cities for today's visitors. Throughout several historical periods, it facilitated contacts between different peoples, and allowed these cultures to penetrate each other. The Silk Road also served as an inexhaustible channel for various kinds of innovations, enabling a great number of achievements in terms of material cultural and spiritual heritage. Indeed, the Silk Road is the historical proof of more than 2000-year of contacts between the East and the West. It also testifies to the possibility of creating of world house of culture

as well as a commitment to tolerance and cultural diversity.

The first exchanges along the Great Silk Road date from the second half of the 2nd-century BCE, as evidenced in Chinese and Greco-Roman sources. However, cultural, spiritual, political and economic ties had already started in the Neolithic period and in the early agricultural civilizations of the Bronze Age. The Silk Road emerged as a system of caravan routes of various lengths. Caravans were able to travel an average of 23-26 kilometres every day. The intercontinental route conformed some ten thousand kilometres, the continental several thousand, and the local routes only a few. There were also smaller paths, mountain trails, hunting grounds and farming pastures. These routes maintained at times a busy transit, serving as an essential strategic road, strengthened by powerful fortifications in a number of nodal points.

Contacts along the Great Silk Road gave rise to unique towns and city-states, comprising important architectural pieces and monuments, and functioning as stop-over locations for the travelling caravan groups. The internal structure of these cities clearly reflects the traditional socio-economic system of the settlements and historic centres, promoted along the network of routes. Their layout offers clues to the functions and purpose of the ancient buildings located within the urban centres, whose features were shared across distinct civilizations, from Europe to China, and from the Maghreb to the Indian subcontinent [1:55]. These sites also provide evidence of the multivalent structures of human communication and knowledge transfer across time and space.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, great efforts are invested in the restoration and protection of these sites. These efforts are the result of cooperation among countries in the region, with the support of the world community, as acknowledged by the president of the republic N. Nazarbayev in his message to the nation "Kazakhstan-2030" [10]. The restoration of the Great Silk Road and its ancient landmarks serves Kazakhstan to rehabilitate its identity prior to years of Soviet rule. It also helps to familiarize the population with the original life style of Kazakh nomadic civilizations and the origins of architectural sites and cities, dictated by practical needs. Thus, the restoration of these sites carries information about the cultures of the original Turkic tribes that inhabited the territory, ensure the continuity of Kazakh heritage and its important contribution to the world's heritage as well.

Cities, like people, have their past and present. Not knowing their past, it is difficult to understand their current state and future development. For this reason, it is important to bring to public awareness the cultural characteristics of great number of ancient and medieval cities on the territory of Kazakhstan, as this can contribute to give an idea of Kazakh culture today.

Many ancient and medieval cities of Kazakhstan disappeared from the earth as a result of wars or natural disasters. Those that remained, preserved the foundations of their economic activity, special political and legal status and topographic signs, some of which can be traced back to this day.

The cities along the Great Silk Road in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan territory in Central Asia was crossed by many of the various caravan routes and paths that formed part of the network of the Great Silk Road. Interaction among cultures took the form of large-scale trading operations, diplomatic agreements and military alliances, but also of cultural exchanges which included two important ground-breaking events: the spread of alphabetic writing, and almost alongside it, the expansion of some of the world's three most important monotheist religions which emerged from the biblical texts, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Although the impact of settled civilizations and urban landscapes was decisive, the role of non-sedentary cultures and nomadic societies cannot be underestimated. In general, nomads, among them especially the Turkic tribes, Indo-Iranian (or proto-Indo-Europeans) and the Arabs developed many products, techniques and ideas still used in everyday life by the global community. Scholars such as Lev Gumilev have indicated the importance of the achievements of Turks and Mongols and their cultural legacy. For example, "male clothes, especially trousers and pants, were invented by ancient nomads. The zipper first appeared between 200 and 400 years ago in Central Asia. The first two-wheeled wooden cart evolved from the original older larger cart and, later, became the tent which allowed nomads to travel through forests and mountains." [2: 39]. Similarly, Karl Baipakov has pointed out the relation between ancient nomad communities and the early forms of urbanism that emerged along the Great Silk Road in the 6th-century. Indeed, the development of the Kazakhstani sections of the Silk Road took, at this time, two main directions: Syrdarya and Tian Shan.

The first route, Syrdarya, began in China and moved through Eastern Turkestan (Kashgar), the Zhetisu (Seven Rivers), and along the banks of the Syrdarya (called first the Jaxartes, and later the Seyhun) into the Aral Sea region, from where it led to the Middle East and Byzantium. The Syrdarya River served here as the main link between East and West, and major trading centres were Zhetisu and various cities in today's southern Kazakhstan. The Tian Shan route determined the movement from East Turkestan through the Zhetisu (Seven Rivers) along the foothills of the Jungar, Ile Alatau, Kyrgyz, and the Talas Ridge to Tashkent, and then through Samarkand, Bukhara, Merv, Asia Minor and Byzantium. In these areas, there were cities such as Taraz, Kulan, Aspara, Almatu, Talhir, Kayalyk, Usbaniket, Otrar, Turkestan, Sauran, Syganak, Yangikent, Saraishyk, SuyabBalasagun, Gazgird, Navaket and Shavgar. In different historical periods, depending on the political situation, the route shifted its direction from the Syrdarya to Tian Shan or in reverse [3: 5].

Karl Baipakov highlights three major areas of urban culture in the territory: South Kazakhstan, South-Western Zhetisu (Talas and Chu valleys) and the North-Eastern Zhetisu (Ile valley). Each of these areas had a peculiar and rich urban culture. Important results of the research work performed on these sites has involved the localization, identification and chronology of almost all the ancient settlements in South Kazakhstan and Zhetisu. Baipakov points out that this may have been facilitated by the fact that many cities have maintained their names until the early modern period. These cities are clearly linked to the trade routes along The Great Silk Road [3: 38]. For instance, the Kaunchin, Otrar-Karatau and Zhhetisar cultures on the Syrdarya River bank in south Kazakhstan date from the last century BCE, with many more urban centres emerging in the Middle Ages. Excavations and written evidence suggest that there were highly developed settled agricultural traditions in the Southern Kazakhstan. In addition, the dissemination of the Sogdian culture may have occurred as a result of their settlement on the Silk Road along the Syrdarya, as evidenced by the names of Sogdian cities such as Farab and Shavgar. Sogdian standards did not overshadow the previous local traditions, being included alongside as component of what now could be interpreted as South Kazakhstan urban culture.

The Cultural Importance of the Cities along the Great Silk Road: the City of Farab/Otrar

Farab was the Persian name for a city irrigated by the river, and birthplace of the great philosopher

and scientist Abu Nasra ibn Mohammed, also known as Al Farabi. Otrar was a major trading centre on the Silk Road, the birthplace of world-renowned thinker Al-Farabi. This is the spiritual cradle, which had the largest library in the world history. The ancient settlement of Otrar was one of the biggest and the most developed cities in the territory of Kazakhstan in period of the 11th-17th centuries. The Otrar oasis is located in present Otrar district of South-Kazakhstan region in 10 kilometers to the west of the railway station of Timur nearby with the present village of Talapty in 57 kilometers to the south of the city of Turkestan not far from influx of the river of Arys into Syr Daria river. The settlement is a remain of the ancient city of Otrar also known as Farab, center of medieval trade. Besides Otrar is the territory or such cities as Kuiruktoba, Kok-Mardan, Altyntobe and Mardan-Kuik also adjoin to the oasis territory [6: 184].

In the Middle Ages Otrar was the commercial and religious capital of great Otrar oasis, spread over 2500 square kilometers large fertile valley at the confluence of the Arys and the Syrdarya rivers. Otrar attracted the attention with enviable position at the crossroads of ancient caravan routes. It was one of the richest and developed for those times towns on the stretch of the Silk Road in Central Asia. Otrar is mentioned in the travel accounts of almost all Arab and Persian authors ever visited this region. It is known that the Otrar oasis included more than 150 small towns, fortresses, castles and fortified settlements, connected by a chain of caravanserais of the Silk Road. At the time of its heyday there a quarter of a million people lived about in Otrar. The city had a large madrasah, market, workshop – smithy, gurt khan is a place where drank wine, bath, mosque, shops. At the end of the XIII century during the Mongol invasion the town was destroyed. But its ruins still elevate as a giant hill over the steppe. Cleared streets and the ruins of houses by archaeologists appear for the tourists as witness the once-teeming city. On this land there were built over a hundred small settlements with traces of military fortifications.

Excavations of Otrar prove about prosperity of the city in the 9th-11th centuries. There were collected rich collections of glass wares – pieces of water-bottles, cups, wineglasses, flacons. There are many jewelry including beads made of andradite and carnelian, glass, rings, bronze bracelets. A treasure containing jewelry, bracelets, rings and coins were found in 1974. All coins were silver. They are of various types, monetary courts and periods. During the excavation of late Middle Ages Otrar there were

collected many ceramics, metal wares, coins and jewelry, stone wares. Glazed and unglazed ceramics are also various. There are many jugs, plates, dishes covered with transparent, blue and green enamel. There is notable decline of the quality of glazes and inscriptions between the ceramics of the 16th and first half of 17th centuries and the ceramics of the 17th-18th centuries [6: 281].

The first explorations of Otrar were conducted by members of Turkestan section of amateur archeologists A.K.Klare and A.A.Cherkassov in 1904. They excavated a range of trench in hope to find remains of palaces and monuments. But they were disappointed as they found only pieces of ceramics and glass. Further explorations were continued in the end of the 40s of the 20th century under the auspices of professor A.N.Bernshtam. The Otrar archeological expedition was organized in 1969, in 1971 it was renamed as Southern Kazakhstan archeological expedition of KazSSR. The main object of their exploration was Otrar-tobe. Since 1991 Baipakov K.M. led the excavations in Otrar. The new project under the auspices of UNESCO, Kazakhstan and Japan Target Fund “Conservation and preservation of the ancient city of Otrar” started in 2001. The key goals of the project: formation of documents base and conservative measures. Implementation of the project allowed museumification of the range of memorials: the Friday mosque in the 16th century, a city block of the 16th century, a building of the 11th-12th centuries, walls, central gates and the gates “Darvaza-i sufi”, stratigraphical pit, bath-house of the 14th century [7].

Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, one the earliest Islamic intellectuals who were instrumental in transmitting the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle to the Muslim world, had a considerable influence on the later Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna. He was an outstanding linguist who translated the Greek works on Aristotle and Plato and made considerable additions to them of his own. He earned the nickname Mallim-e-Sani, which is translated as “second master” or “second teacher”. Farabi contributed considerably to science, philosophy, logic, sociology, medicine, mathematics and music, but the major ones are in philosophy, logic and sociology and for which he stands out as an encyclopedist.

Al-Farabi, left us a beautiful testimony of intercultural communication and cultural interaction. He wrote: “We have an opportunity, to liaise with all peoples, whose physical properties, food and life-style is quite normal... In our day Arab state covers all civilized countries, except those countries that can be considered purely Greek or Roman, as well

as those countries that located in the neighbourhood of the latter. Anyway, these nations are our neighbours, and we can study their customs and habits. Many Greeks and Rumi [the Byzantines] emigrate and settle in the Arab state and tell us much about their countries” [8: 159].

As a reflection and reaction to this situation we can consider the Al-Farabi thoughts on the ways of argumentation in the environment of contending and disputing theologians cited in his famous “*Treatise on the views of the residents of the virtuous city*”. In the same vein, we can interpret the socially significant differences in the means of attainment the truth of the *residents* of the virtuous city who are subject to not only from one’s natural abilities, but also on cultural and social conditions of society. The Al-Farabi works bear pronounced imprint of polemicist and lively discussion of various points of view and author’s positions. The aphoristic nature and conciseness, synthesis and generalization, and rationality permeated with the light of spirituality – the distinctive features of his works and the nature of philosophical creation. His philosophical thoughts, revelations left a significant trace in the history of world philosophy and demonstrated the historical experience of the different cultures and civilizations ideas synthesis. They showed an example of the mutually beneficial dialogue implementation between different philosophical systems. Al-Farabi philosophy represents the historical prototype of the modern intercultural dialogue and the model has historically performed the dialogue of East and West cultures.

The approval that al-Farabi’s philosophy has implemented a specific type of philosophical communication and dialogue, was recorded in the names-definitions left to us by history: “the Second Teacher”, “the commentator of Aristotle”. Al-Farabi considers the dialogue not only as an art of understanding the truth and the method of its location, which makes its position close to the search for ancient Greek philosophy. But he deepens this thought significantly. This is manifested in the Al-Farabi philosophy in a new understanding of dialogue as deep human existence foundation, which is imbued with the light of God, inspired by His love and mercy. Eternal student of God and his creation – man enters into a continuing dialogue with the Creator, with the one who changes the man and directs him to the heights of perfection [8: 174].

Al-Farabi’s discussion about the problem of an *ideal generous society* (“*al-madina al-fadila*”), which is governed by connoisseur, is very important. Firstly, formulating the basis of an ideal society that

is governed by equitable leader has been the dream in every age, secondly, generous society adapts common human space. It is connected with every century, any expectation of people. The language and religion, culture and civilization of the generous city never go under the doubt. There is a common sign of generous citizens – longing to the improvement in the way of achieving common goals. Supporting each other according to the “favour” norms in the way of reaching the happiness – is the position of a good city. The things we can notice from al-Farabi’s ideas on society and state-city are: *firstly*, he thought that it is possible to form generous city; *secondly*, he believed in this would be done through people’s re-upbringing. He showed the main place of human in this way. The inborn wise, talented person is able to correct people via governing power. For this leader needs governing art. Leader’s governing art is constituted from mastering twelve terms.

The Al-Farabi philosophy shows to modern world that the basis of intercultural dialogue is deeply humanistic principles. The thinker gives priority to spiritual values and shows respect for the positions and views of other people, guided by only a single goal – delivering the highest truth. His philosophical worldview expresses the culture of harmony and tolerance that does not mean conformism and the lack of a principled position on significant problems of social and personal development. Based on humanistic principles, the dialogue should encourage person to understanding and mutual respect [9: 351]. The humanistic the ideas that were laid out in the heritage of Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, should become an integral part of modern humanism not only in the development of our civil society of Kazakhstan, as well as in modern world civilization community.

The Revival of the Great Silk Road

The Silk Road is not just an economic project for Kazakhstan. The civilizations and cultures that emerged in these territories are of importance in order to see common heritage of the Eurasian continent and the connections between the Atlantic and the Pacific Rims.

Four of the seven thousand kilometres of the ancient Great Silk Road passed across the territory of Kazakhstan. Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran and Turkey also participate in the project “Revival of the Great Silk Road”. The United Nations first suggested and promoted the implementation of the Great Silk Road revival in its 1993 General Assembly, contemplating it as important channel of

the international cooperation in diplomacy, culture, science, trade, tourism. In 1988, the project “Integral study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue” was adopted by UNESCO, scheduling an extensive and detailed study of the history of this ancient route in relation to the formation and development of cultural relations between East and West, and the improvement of connections between the nations of the Eurasian continent [4]. Cultural communication, transport and tourism became the most important components in the project.

Hundreds of cultural, art and science figures of the participant countries in the project “Revival of the Great Silk Road” gathered at the international forum “Eurasian culture in the new world” in Astana. In one of his interviews, Evgeny Nikitinsky, chairman of the Industry and Tourism Committee, explained that one of the outcomes of the project would be to unite these territories within a uniform tourist highway so that visitors are not faced with obstacles such as single entry visas required to travel to five of the countries that conform the ancient Silk Road, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Unfortunately this is still in the process of discussion.

More positive outcomes of the project have been the creation of an International Tourist centre, “New Ile”, on the coast of the Kapshagai reservoir, the ethnographic complex YUKO, a historical and cultural museum as well as archaeological monuments in the Otrar district in south Kazakhstan, pilgrim villages in Turkestan, a free economic zone at the International Tourist centre of “Burabai”, the city of the new Millennium or “Aktau city”, as well as another tourist centre, that of “Kenderli” on the Caspian sea coast [5].

Experts believe that the development of an economic belt along the Silk Road will give additional impetus to the growth of Kazakhstani economy. The idea and concept of this project was first presented by the President of China, Xi Jinping, during his official visit to Kazakhstan in 2013. The Chinese leader emphasized that the main focus would be the intensive construction of the road network, the elimination of trade barriers and the establishment of measures for economic cooperation between the countries of the region.

The construction of the international corridor “Western Europe – Western China” has already made great contribution to the project of “The Silk Road revival”. As a country located between Europe and Asia, Kazakhstan, could become a major transport hub on the Eurasian continent. The route, with some 8.5 thousand kilometres, covers

almost three thousands of kilometres of the territory of Kazakhstan. A new highway has been designed to improve transport links between Europe and Western China. Indeed, the future transport arteries of this revived Silk Road will connect regions with a combined population of three billion people, conforming the largest market in the world. This will provide great opportunities for the Kazakhstani economy.

This program for an economic belt development along the Great Silk Road is based on the concept of collaboration and the strengthening of international relations among the countries of the region in terms of politics, economy, trade and monetary circulation, communications and transport, as well as culture. Thus, the Silk Road Belt will significantly expand international cooperation in the Eurasian region.

Simultaneously, this program coincides with the work in the area of strengthening of Kazakhstani cultural identity within the so-called “One Hundred steps” program, which involves the implementation of a stronger tourist industry in Kazakhstan by the year 2020, and the creation of various regional cultural and touristic clusters such as “Astana – heart of Eurasia”, “Almaty – free cultural zone of Kazakhstan”, “The unity of nature and nomadic culture”, “the pearl of Altai”, “Revival of the Great Silk Road”, or “The Caspian gates”. The aim of the project is to allow Kazakh citizens as well as foreign tourists to learn more about cultural and religious diversity of the country, a diversity that became possible because the Great Silk Road was penetrated by many different cultures and religions, including the three great monotheistic religions as well as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and others.

Currently, Kazakhstan has all the conditions for attracting foreign and domestic investment in the development of its tourist industry, either through public-private partnership or by the support and promotion of private initiatives. A comprehensive discussion of these issues took place at the 5th International meeting of the World Tourism Organization UNWTO held in October 2010 in Samarkand (Uzbekistan). Focusing on The Great Silk Road, the meeting brought together representatives from twenty-five countries. Here, the “Action plan on implementation of the Great Silk Road international project for 2010-2011” was adopted as the basis for further development of tourism along the ancient historic route. Recommendations were enforced on joint participation and the cooperation of all Silk Road countries to strengthen the brand “Silk Road” and its pool of resources, as well

as the elimination of political barriers, and the simplification of visa and border formalities between the member countries of the project, all of which are being developed. According to the adopted Action plan in the framework of the international tourism exhibition World Travel Market WTM 2010 in London, a “Media Market Silk Road” panel was held, which was attended by Kazakhstan and the countries of Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, as well as leading foreign tour operators. These are just a few examples to show that the Great Silk Road is possibly the best-known brands in the region, and that the planning and controlled development of touristic resources along the route are important for the preservation and restoration of the world cultural heritage of the countries on the ancient historic highway.

Significant obstacles to closer economic cooperation in the Central Asian region were pointed out and still remain today: first of all visa problems. Unfortunately, there is no consensus on the issue of mutual recognition of tourist visas for nationals of third countries to this day. Thus, for the successful promotion of the Silk Road project it has been considered important:

1) To implement the recommendations of the Astana Declaration on the Silk Road adopted at the XVIII General Assembly of the WTO;

2) To consider the proposal of introducing a single tourist visa “Silk Road” by national tourist administrations working closely with city officials. Kazakhstan has acted, and will continue to act as a mediator for the implementation of this proposal of visiting tours along the Silk Road preferably with a single tourist visa for up to 3 months, a visa recognized by the visited member countries;

3) To establish uniform standards of service on all types of transport and accommodation for the participant countries on the “Silk Road” project;

4) To consider the creation of a unified tourist product for the countries of the Great silk road;

5) To develop the potential attractiveness of the Silk Road, which includes: the restoration of cultural sites and historical monuments on the ancient caravan route; the development of arts and crafts with the aim of preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Silk Road countries; the implementation and promotion of joint strategies, programs and marketing for the successful promotion of the project; the creation of a touristic image in the Central Asian region involved in the development of cultural tourism of the Great Silk Road.

The successful implementation of this transcontinental project of the United Nations,

UNWTO and UNESCO on the sustainable development of tourism on the ancient, historic route of the Great Silk Road will also encourage intercultural dialogue. In this way, the cities along the Silk Road can become real networks for human exchanges of various kinds, just as it used to be in ancient times.

Conclusion

In summary, this article has considered the importance of settlements and cities along the Great Silk Road as an ancient route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Rims. It has also looked at the transnational project that, with the involvement of international institutions and various countries, seeks to revive the Silk Road for the promotion of tourism. However, despite the obvious economic importance of this project, its development will also cover other important objective such as the recovery and preservation of ancient cultural heritage, and the raising of awareness towards all kinds of exchanges, not just trade, that took place along the route, all of which contributed to intercultural communication in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.

In the particular case of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the project will help reveal the ancient roots of the Kazakh people art and spirituality, and contribute to give further visibility to the territory and its mediating mission among various cultures in Central Asia. Thus, the project draws attention to the distinctive history and culture of the Kazakh people and their recognized hospitality, associated not just with their nomad background but with the establishment of certain settlements along the Great Silk Road. Kazakhstan has always a promoter of peace and rapprochement among peoples, helping foster respect, tolerance and understanding based on humanitarian values, and Kazakh people see themselves as contributing to the recovery of these ancient routes, as promoters of cooperation, including economic investment, but also as political artificers of closer links between China, Russia, and Europe and from there with the other side of the Atlantic. In particular, through the initiative of the “Revival of the Great Silk Road” project, Kazakhstan seeks to enhance intercultural and interreligious dialogue among the countries and communities involved in the project, all of which have territories along the Great Silk Road, and the world at large.

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